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ABSTRACT

A presentation based on the research of Dr. John Goodlad and Dr. Benjamin Bloom is given which compares alternative learning approaches to the traditional learning approach. Alternative learning approaches are defined as approaches that may change or adjust one or more of the three major components of learning which are curriculum, testing and measurement, and instruction. Three factors described that make alternative learning approaches successful are common sense, sound research, and a strong administrator. The characteristics of the traditional learning component include a curriculum that emphasizes factual and rote learning, testing for the wrong reasons, and instruction that is largely teacher directed. The following are some of the characteristics which should be part of the alternative learning approach: (1) the curriculum component should emphasize mastery learning and time on task; (2) the testing and measurement component should emphasize learning at cognitive levels other than recall; and (3) the instructional component should emphasize activities that make the learner an active part of the learning process. Four books and two journal articles are listed as reference material. A biographical sketch of the author concludes this paper. (EM)

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WHAT ARE "ALTERNATIVE LEARNING APPROACHES" AND DO THEY WORK?

- A presentation by Dr. Stephen P. Scovic, Superintendent
The Bethel School District, Tipp City, Ohio 45371

Let me begin by informing you that our public schools are indeed successful.

The Center of Educational Statistics states that, "no other country in the world has succeeded in providing learning opportunities for its youth to the extent of the United States." We now have almost eighty percent of our youth completing high school. This is in contrast with an average of about thirty-three percent in the other highly developed nations. Approximately fifty percent of our young people enter some form of higher education. This is in contrast with an average of twenty-five percent in the other highly developed nations of the world. In no other country has the level of financial support for the learners and the schools reached the level to be found in the U. S. We now contribute about one-sixth of our Gross National Product to education when we count both the funds contributed to the support of the students and the support of the schools and colleges. So you see, as educators and school board members, we have much about which to be proud.

Yet, at the same time, we must strive to improve our educational methods. We must make every effort to try to develop an educational system where optimum learning will take place. Therefore, today we are here to discuss alternative learning approaches. Specifically, we are interested in what they are and if they work. Let's first frame our discussion by defining some terms and answering a few questions that will move us to the heart of the issue.

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Whenever learning is discussed, we are talking about one or all of the three major components of learning.

The three components of learning are:

1. The curriculum guide component - This component identifies what information we teach, in what sequence, and to what cognitive level.
2. The testing and measurement component - This component identifies the tests (achievement, aptitude, diagnostic, or criterion reference) we use and how we use the test information.
3. The instructional component - This component identifies how teachers teach their students.

Having defined learning a little more clearly, let's try to answer the major question of,"What are alternative learning approaches?"

Alternative learning approaches are those learning approaches that vary from the traditional, or known, uses of the learning components. For example, alternative approaches may change or adjust the curriculum. Do you remember the elective curriculum movement, or new math movement? Also, alternative approaches may change or adjust the testing component. Remember the ungraded education movement? Finally, alternative approaches may change or adjust the teaching methods. Who can forget the open space movement, or the individualized instruction movement?

By using these examples, I do not want to give the impression that these alternative forms of learning were ineffective. In some school systems, each of these approaches to learning met with success.

All of these thoughts lead to the question, "Will alternative approaches work?"

Certainly we must continue to improve the learning approaches we use, but we must not make the mistakes of the past. We have lived through the times when common sense did not prevail in education. We had an era when administrators and teachers became intimidated by students with long hair and parents with lawyers.

During that period, we accepted each new idea as gospel. We forgot the importance of discipline in the classroom, and sound teaching techniques. We allowed students to select their courses and some selected not to become educated.

As educators and citizens involved in education, we cannot look at the alternatives to traditional learning without first understanding what it is that we now do that is good. We must choose alternative approaches to learning that are based on common sense and sound research rather than making changes for change sake.

Also, it is essential that each school district hire the strongest administrators possible. Each school system must have a superintendent who can talk to parents and community members so that the whole community believes in what is being done. There are school systems across this country and alternative learning approaches that are failing because there is poor administrative leadership.

Having defined our terms and answered a few basic questions about learning, please allow me to proceed in a more scholarly manner.

Let me compare what the research tells us about the traditional learning components and then let me give you the characteristics that I believe alternative learning components should have.

THE CURRICULUM COMPONENT

Let's now look at what Dr. John Goodlad, the Dean of Graduate Education at U.C.L.A., and his associates found out about the traditional curriculum component when they completed their comprehensive study of the American classroom. Dr. Goodlad and his associates studied 1,106 classrooms and have written about their latest findings in a book titled, A Place Called School (McGraw-Hill, 1983). Their findings provide a clear and most comprehensive picture of what is typically happening in our schools today.

Here are some of Dr. Goodlad's findings from comments he made at a presentation in January at the University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio. I ask you to ask yourself, "Do these findings describe your school?"

When studying the traditional curriculum component, Dr. Goodlad found it to have the following characteristics:

1. Goodlad described a sameness of form in the substance and design of the curriculums of all these schools; whether the subject is English, mathematics, science, or social studies. The courses of studies and textbooks are all organized the same way.

2. The courses are laid out by grade level. Each grade level carries forward items and adds a few new items. The presentations in the text usually include quizzes that require low-level cognitive (factual) responses.
3. The teachers listed the same topics listed in the text as that which they intend for the students to learn and they used objective type quizzes requiring low-level cognitive responses to measure achievement. In other words, we are teaching from the text. I would add that often times, unless teachers are observed frequently, they have a tendency to spend more time teaching the sub categories of the subject that they like or with which they are the most comfortable.
4. Goodlad found we are wasting classroom instructional time. Research has proven that the longer the amount of time is spent on a task, the higher the level of learning. Yet, we only spend seventy percent of class time on instruction at the elementary level and seventy-five percent of class time on instruction at the high school level.

Therefore, what we have today is a curriculum that teaches fact and requires rote learning. Often, we have a curriculum that evaluates the student by asking him or her to restate or repeat facts. Frequently, we have a curriculum that is designed by textbook publishers because teachers are teaching almost exclusively from the textbook.

It is essential to note, at this point, that Benjamin S. Bloom in his 1956 text titled, Cognitive Taxonomy of Educational Objections stated that; "Our instructional material, our classroom teaching methods, and our testing methods rarely rise above the lowest category of cognitive learning - Knowledge." This category is what we know as rote learning.

It seems to me, we should be looking at an alternative curriculum guide component that has these characteristics:

1. The curriculum guide should identify a core curriculum that all students must master in each subject area.
2. The curriculum guide should list specific subject matter objectives and a corresponding list of skills to be mastered. These listings should be in sequence.
3. The curriculum guide should specify teaching objectives in a manner that will require the student to learn the information through activities where he will:
    a. apply the information
    b. make comparisons with the information
    c. make assumptions using the information
    d. learn the information from hands-on instruction where we are actively involved in the learning process.
4. The curriculum guide should provide a basis for pupil evaluations other than factual objective type tests.
5. The curriculum guide function should stress the importance of time on task.

Having looked at the traditional curriculum component and what the characteristics of an alternative curriculum component should be, let me now talk about the testing and measurement component.

THE TESTING AND MEASUREMENT COMPONENT

I ask you, traditionally why have we tested pupils?

The answer is, a variety of reasons. For example:

1. We give I.Q. tests so Dad can find out if Junior has his smart genes or if Junior received his intelligence from the in-laws!
2. We give achievement tests to see if the youngster is achieving at the same or better level than his classmates. As parents, we really don't want to know if he is testing lower.
3. The teacher wants to know how the class is progressing after instruction.
4. We want to compare our school population to the rest of the school populations in the region or nation.
5. We use achievement tests to screen for placement in advanced classes, special classes and college or post high school programs.
6. We use objective type tests over ninety-five percent of the time.

All of these are traditional reasons, but maybe there are other reasons tests should be used that would serve our learning process better. After all, Goodlad found that nearly six percent of all classroom time is spent taking tests and quizzes.

Don't the reasons I just gave you for testing sound typical of your school?

Now I ask you....

1. What if teachers are testing for the wrong information?
2. We have determined that our curriculum teaches primarily factual information. What does it mean to just test facts if we know that factual information, if not applied, will not be remembered for very long?
3. If we outlawed objective type of tests in the classroom, would our students learn how to write better because they would have to write more and have to learn to express themselves in writing?
4. Shouldn't we use tests to determine the student's actual achievement, then make a comparison with his aptitude test results to see if he needs additional instruction?
5. Shouldn't we use tests to decide what the teacher needs to re-teach rather than just giving the pupil the grade and going on?

Let us look at what research data regarding pupil testing told Dr. Benjamin Bloom, the noted educational researcher from the University of Chicago. In a presentation given in this convention center at the 1978 Annual Conference of A.S.C.D., Dr. Bloom stated research that we should all consider long and hard when we view our approach to learning.

The traditional view has been that learning ability was regarded as a highly predictable characteristic and intelligence or aptitude tests were widely used to predict the student's school achievement. If learning can be predicted, then there is little reason for schools to try to improve student achievement.

What Dr. Bloom's research has indicated is that there are faster and there are slower learners. If the instruction and time is adapted to each student's needs, the achievement distribution will be highly skewed. Most of the student test scores would pile up on the high end of the achievement measure.

Bloom believes students do need different amounts of time and help, with the slower learner initially needing perhaps as much as five times the amount of time required by faster students. The result of research is that the aptitude test can no longer be used to predict the final achievement scores, but should be used to predict the amount of time each student needs to learn the subject to a high level. This concept is a key concept used in mastery learning.

Typical results of Bloom's mastery learning studies in schools found that about eighty percent of students in a mastery class reach the same final level of achievement (A or B+) as approximately the top twenty percent of the class under traditional group instruction.

Therefore, I suggest we should be looking at an alternative testing and measurement component that would have the following characteristics:

1. Students would be given aptitude tests to indicate if the student would need additional time to master tasks.
2. Achievement tests would measure mastery of information at cognitive levels other than recall. The student would have to apply facts, make assumptions, and formulate comparisons. This would mean that the traditional objective test would decrease substantially in use.
3. Testing would be done periodically as an indicator for the teacher to be used in re-teaching information.
4. There would be periodic tests given to indicate whether or not the student had mastered the content.

THE INSTRUCTIONAL COMPONENT

Let's look at what research tells us about the traditional way in which teachers teach and the effect that has on learning.

Goodlad's research paints the following picture of the instruction in today's typical public schools. Do the following characteristics describe your school?

1. In the elementary class about seventy percent of time is spent on instruction.
2. In the high school class about seventy-five percent of time is spent on instruction.

3. In the typical high school class, during forty-three minutes of instruction in a fifty-seven minute class period, the teacher and student spend the time in talk. Usually thirty minutes of this time is spent with the teacher out-talking the class.
4. In the normal five-period day, the student is exposed to approximately 150 minutes of "teacher talk".
5. About seven of these 150 minutes involves the teachers responding to individual student questions.
6. For teachers, the non-verbal time is divided evenly. Half the time the teacher is alone at his or her desk and half the time the teacher is moving around the classroom.

I ask you, does this not sound familiar?

Also, note should be taken to the small amount of time students are given to express themselves and clarify information. Is it any wonder why the student who needs more time falls behind when so much of his or her learning is teacher directed? Also keep in mind that our research on the curriculum has told us that mostly factual information is being given while the student remains passive.

When students are asked which classes they find most interesting, the arts outrank all subjects, followed by physical education or vocational subjects. No academic subject ranks above fourth place for interest at the secondary level. The reason is that the non-academic subjects offer more demonstrations, discussions, simulation, and role playing.

In the typical classroom today the instructional techniques of the teacher center on the teacher being very much in control. I would suggest that the alternative learning approaches should have the following instructional characteristics:

1. The teacher should not lecture more than twenty minutes.
2. There should be a greater emphasis on open-ended questions where students are allowed to clarify information.
3. There should be activities which make the learner an active part of the learning process. Activities which call for or permit student planning, follow-through and evaluation. These learning experiences should be what Maslow called "peak learning experiences". Maslow stated that peak learning experiences tend to be so vivid that students recall them in great detail years later. Such experiences form landmarks in the students' later school recollections. Maslow found that they were typically the source of new interests in a subject, the stimulus to major attitude and value changes, and they served to make school learning truly exciting. (For example - conventions, plays, debates, science fairs)
   A graphic example of this is the T.V. show, "Fame", which displays "peak learning experiences" in a school setting.
4. The prevailing instructional group should include small group activities.

5. Teacher evaluation models should require frequent classroom observations by administrators. These observations must be structured so that the teacher's performance can be critiqued and refined until the instructional techniques of the teacher allow the student to become a more active learner. Through this process, and where the level of learning stimulates young people to learn to think, then education will follow.

I have intentionally hesitated to speak about specific learning alternatives so as to not confuse what I believe is an essential comparison between traditional learning approaches and the characteristics of sound alternative learning approaches. I will be happy to discuss specific alternative learning approaches during the question and answer session.

Thank you for your attention. I leave you with this thought. Every school can become an exciting place to learn. I know because my school system is an exciting place in which to learn. We respect the child and demand that he takes thinking, and learning to think, seriously. It <u>is</u> a challenge! It <u>is</u> exciting!

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Stephen P. Scovic, Ed. D. Biographical Sketch

Superintendent of Schools Bethel, Ohio

"Parents expect schools to provide a basic education for their children and school administrators should be held accountable to do so", Dr. Scovic said in a Dayton Journal Herald interview in October, 1979.

Dr. Scovic's commitment to education began more than seventeen years ago as a teacher and counselor in Northridge Schools in Dayton, Ohio where he was the author and instructional leader of a crisis center for disruptive students. This center received attention when it was cited, by a North Central Evaluation Committee report, as the "single most effective behavior modification program its members had observed".

As Assistant Principal in Northridge High School, Dayton, Ohio, 1971-75, he wrote and administered the first In-school Suspension Program in the Greater Dayton Area. This program reduced out-of-school suspension days from 350 to ninety-four in one year and enabled numerous students to continue and complete an education that otherwise would have been disrupted.

Since he became a principal in Vandalia Schools in 1975 and now as Superintendent of Bethel Schools in Miami County, Dr. Scovic has become known locally as an authority on competency based education and instructional expectations. While principal, Dr. Scovic led his faculty in the writing of minimum competencies in mathematics, reading, and writing skills. The success of this program received local attention in articles written in the October, 1979 Dayton Daily News and Dayton Journal Herald.

Dr. Scovic has researched and written extensively on the topic of instructional expectations for teachers. He has identified the four components of successful teaching (preparations, active presentation, assessment, classroom management) and corresponding skills that can be observed through the clinical method of classroom observation. As superintendent, Dr. Scovic has been successful in keeping Bethel Schools financially sound. Recently, he organized an operating levy campaign which passed by a fifty-six percent vote, and a capital improvement levy that received sixty-two percent voter approval.

Dr. Scovic received a B.S. and M.S. degree from the University of Dayton and and Ed. D. degree from the University of Cincinnati. He has taught at the elementary school level, high school level, and at Wright State University and the University of Dayton.

Dr. Scovic was named Teacher-of-the-Year in the Northridge Schools in 1974, and selected as a candidate for a White House Fellowship in 1975. Presently, Dr. Scovic is a member of the Board of Directors of M.D.E.C.A. and an Executive Director of the Dayton Area Superintendent's Association.

He has conducted numerous workshops for teachers and administrators on the topics of improving classroom instruction and competency education. He has conducted workshops for parents on drug education and child-parent relationships.

He is a consultant to various administrative organizations as well as faculty committees at the University of Dayton.

Dr. Scovic and his wife, Carol, have two sons.

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